

## THE ROLE OF THE FRESHWATER FOUNDATION IN THE KELLOGG GROUNDWATER POLICY EDUCATION PROJECT

*Linda Schroeder  
Freshwater Foundation*

The role of the Freshwater Foundation as a coalition member in the Kellogg Groundwater Policy Education Project could not be more logical. The Freshwater Foundation's goal is to translate and interpret freshwater issues and implications for the public. As a non-profit, nonendowed, nonadvocacy organization, we seek to provide the public with information to help them make wise choices about the things they choose to do. We also seek to serve as a catalyst and a facilitator, to provide a forum whereby many viewpoints can come together to focus on common concerns.

### **The Value of Partnerships**

The Freshwater Foundation also believes in partnerships. Partnerships allow groups to share efforts, to share dollars, to share networks and to share expertise. We strongly believe there is too much to be done to allow for duplicating efforts unless there is some reason to do so. Working together enhances everyone's efforts and everyone's resources and in this day of limited budgets and limited staffs, it seems unwise to pursue any other course.

The Freshwater Foundation has been involved in informal coalitions for many years. We worked for years with the medical community—doctors, medical associations, public health nurses and environmental health organizations—to develop a publication called the *Health and Environment Digest*. It took many years of focusing on issues to develop the trust of these many organizations and to encourage them to focus on issues rather than on their differences. The Foundation seeks to get all the right people to the table by presenting the issue in such a way that the right people get involved.

Another area in which we have formed this kind of coalition is agricultural chemicals and groundwater. The Freshwater Foundation will have its fourth national conference on this issue this fall. What we have sought to do since 1986 is to bring everyone in the agricultural and environmental communities together to discuss the issue of agricultural chemical use and groundwater protection. The diversity of view-

points is shared in a nonthreatening setting, where the pervasive perspective is that we've all been a part of the problem and we all need to become a part of the solution. The focus is also always on reasonable, realistic, workable solutions. This approach seems to attract people who "come to the table" willing to focus on what we can do together to do the best for everyone involved.

### **Formalizing Coalition-Building**

The Freshwater Foundation was intrigued by the Kellogg Groundwater Policy Education Project because it represents a formal coalition-building initiative. An extension of the kind of work we have been doing for years, it lends a legitimacy to the process and to what is involved in building truly effective coalitions.

As a member of this coalition, the Freshwater Foundation offers experience with coalition-building, background in the issue of groundwater, expertise in public education, an understanding of the need for an objective, unbiased perspective and, finally, a perspective to complement that of the work of the Cooperative Extension System. In many ways the goals of the Freshwater Foundation, extension, and the Soil and Water Conservation Society are parallel. It seems wise, then, to combine the expertise, the networks and the efforts of these three groups to do as effective a job as possible in testing the formal process of building coalitions.

The Freshwater Foundation is most pleased to be a part of this exciting project. We look forward to both giving to and learning from the process.